

ENVIRONMENT NOW

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August 30, 1999

Mr. Lester Snow, Executive Director
CalFed Bay-Delta Program
By Telefax: 916-654-9780

RE: Comment on "Preferred Program Plan"

Dear Mr. Snow,

Please accept the following comments on the Preferred Alternative. These comments were prepared for publication in local newspapers.

"Shopping In Our Own Closet"

Did you ever come home with a new shirt only to discover there's one just like it already hanging in the closet?

CalFed is the public-private "roundtable" that is trying to fairly allocate the majority of California's water (which flows through the San Francisco Bay-Sacramento River Delta areas) over the next 30 years. This is not a new challenge. But giving all stakeholders, including fish and wildlife, an equal seat at the table while simultaneously incorporating the anticipated explosion of the state's population does present a fresh sense of urgency.

After several years of work, CalFed has come up with a "preferred alternative" among many possible scenarios. Thus far, despite many competing interests and opinions it doesn't seem as if there will be a lack of water, or even a lack of money to capture, store, clean and convey it. There is however, in the "preferred alternative" a stunning lack of imagination.

If the proposal we are being asked to support with our tax dollars looks very familiar, it is. For decades we have built dams and canals. What does the "new" CalFed proposal offer? More dams and canals. The "strategists" who bring us this less-than-bold initiative assume that we will not survive the coming population increase without more concrete. But the assumptions used to make this judgement are based on 1985 statistics and try to predict needs 30 years into the future. Can you think of any predictions made 45 years ago that are valid today?

Despite sharp population increases in Los Angeles over the past 10 years, we now use the same amount of water as we did ten years ago. Conservation works. When



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we had to, we went shopping in our own closet. Santa Barbara has done even better by reducing wasteful landscape watering and permitting gray water systems. Is there some reason all of us can't use ultra-low flow toilets and, for that matter, install plumbing so that we flush our toilets with the same water we used to take a shower?

But everyone must help if we are to survive within our existing means. Agriculture uses 85% of all water consumed in California. A 5% reduction in water use by agribusiness would be the same as a 28% reduction by municipal users. Moreover, our groundwater supplies are at serious risk. We withdraw 1.3 million acre feet of water more than is recharged each year into the ground. The vast majority of this unsustainable "overdraft" is by agribusiness.

Will Rogers advised "buy land because they ain't making any more of it." In fact, we have discovered land beyond our own boundaries and will probably have colonies on the moon or Mars in the next century. But we have yet to prove the existence of water anywhere else in the universe. All of the fresh water we ever had on earth or ever will have is on the planet right now. It just cycles into clouds, rain, evaporation, and so on, but it's never lost or gained. So one day, given our current wasteful practices, demand will exceed supply. For all intents and purposes, it already has.

So what would happen if we now dared to use our imagination? We don't need a CalFed process to deliver more of the same. Our elected officials and bureaucrats have done that for nearly a century. Instead, what if CalFed began from the premise that more costly infrastructure was impossible - that we would have to supply our future needs with our current supply? Could we find enough water in our own closet?

CalFed staff is now conducting public hearings throughout the state to hear from anyone who uses water. Therefore everyone should attend and at least listen - your future depends on it. This process will determine what we pay for water; how reliable the supply will be; and how clean it will be. It will also determine the fate of fish and other wildlife that depend on water that is allowed to simply flow out to sea.

CalFed currently tries to give everything to everyone by recommending more infrastructure. Instead, based on proven conservation models and real-world conservation potential CalFed should re-allocate existing resources more equitably, but with conservation incentives and rewards as the new "source" for future demand. We don't need to spend billions on more infrastructure. We just need to look in our own closet.

Sincerely,



Terry Tamminen,
Executive Director